

'Your baby is starving'

Kerry Barker tried to take in what the midwife at the health clinic was telling her.

The woman repeated: 'Your baby is starving and underweight.'

Kerry tried to hold back her tears. She had been struggling to breastfeed Ava and she'd had suspicions that her four-week-old baby daughter wasn't thriving, but she wasn't prepared for such bad news.

She said: 'I've been feeding her all the time.'

They both looked at baby Ava. She had only just regained her birth weight of 7lb 8oz. According to the charts she should have weighed 9lb 9oz.

The midwife said: 'I'm afraid your breast milk just isn't good enough. If you don't top her up with some formula over the weekend, she'll start to digest her own liver fat.'

Kerry picked Ava up and left the health centre in tears. At home she settled her baby, then sat down and burst out crying again. The

last four weeks had seemed like one continuous breastfeed. What was she doing wrong?

Believing that she had failed her baby, Kerry felt she had no choice but to try formula.

'Why did they let me think I was a failure?'

She bought baby milk, teats, bottles and sterilising equipment. But when she tried to give Ava a bottle, she spat the milk out.

Kerry switched back to breastfeeding and three days later she returned to the clinic. Ava's weight had gone up but only slightly.

She continued to feed Ava every other hour but by the end of the week her baby had gained only 80g.

By now Kerry was exhausted. She was snapping at her partner Hassan Chowdhury, 34, and he had to do all the housework when he came home from his job as a primary school teacher.

One morning Kerry

went along to the local breastfeeding cafe held every week in a room at a nearby nursery and run by a midwife.

She talked to some of the other mums about her problems.

One of them, Suzanne, said: 'That's what happened to me. My baby was getting thinner and thinner and no one would listen when I said she was struggling to feed.'

'In the end I paid £250 to see a lactation specialist who told me that my baby



Kerry and Ava now

tongue is attached to the bottom of the mouth by a flap of skin, making it hard to suck properly.'

Back home at Renness Road, Walthamstow, London, Kerry felt a mixture of fury and relief.

She asked Hassan: 'Why didn't one of the paediatricians who checked Ava at the birth or one of the health visitors pick this up? Why did they let me think I was a failure as a mum?'

He said: 'The important thing is that now we know what's wrong with her and something can be done about it.'

The breastfeeding counsellor referred Ava to King's College Hospital in London for a minor

operation.

Doctors wrapped Ava in a sheet, opened her mouth and cut the flap of skin.

She screamed and blood dripped from her mouth, but within minutes she was breastfeeding as if she'd never stop.

She seemed like a new baby, woozy and relaxed.

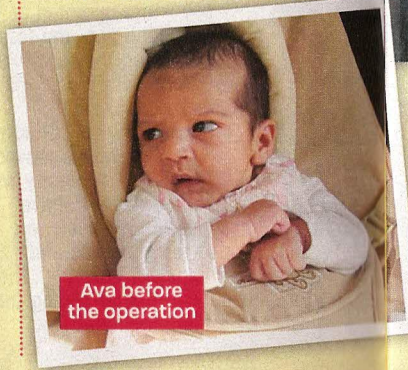
Kerry said: 'I think she's drunk on milk.'

Ava is now thriving but Kerry, 36, is still angry because no one would believe that it was baby Ava who had a problem.

She says: 'It was dreadful watching her turn into skin and bones — and it was all so unnecessary.'

'If your baby isn't feeding, don't be fobbed off with the explanation that your breast milk is no good. Midwives and health visitors don't always know better than you.'

Alice Metcalfe



Ava before the operation

had a tongue-tie.'

Convinced that Ava must have the same thing, Kerry went to see a breastfeeding counsellor recommended by Suzanne and other mums. She confirmed that Ava did indeed have a tongue-tie.

She said: 'It means the

£200 Tell us your health story — or about your operation. Write to *Heartbeat, Take a Break*, FREEPOST LON12043, H Bauer Publishing, London NW1 1YU. We'll pay £200 if we publish it.

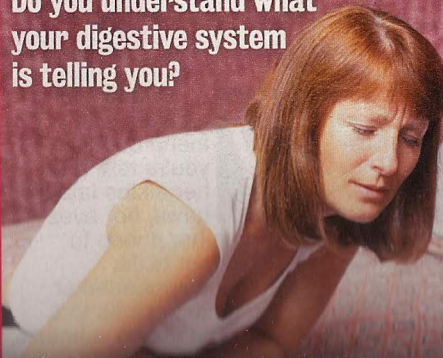
Special Report

The Gut Health Guide

We often talk about having a gut feeling but listening to what your digestive tract is trying to tell you could be important.

The gut uses all five senses to communicate, and here are some tips on how you can tune in and understand your

Do you understand what your digestive system is telling you?



to be anything to worry about from a medical perspective, although it can be antisocial! You should be more concerned if you pass no wind whatsoever. This could be a sign of an obstructed bowel.

Sight: Bowel movements are a good indication of your digestive health. Stools can

be one of the first symptoms of a gut problem.

Occasional indigestion is nothing to worry about but if it is painful, persistent and develops without apparent cause, and is accompanied by other symptoms such as vomiting, difficulty swallowing or loss of appetite, see your doctor.

The symptoms could indicate ulcers, gallstones or — rarely — cancer

as gingivitis can make the mouth taste foul.

Those with acid reflux may experience a metallic taste caused by regurgitated stomach acid. This can leave people vulnerable to diseases such as ulcers and cancers so medical advice should be sought.

Antibiotics can also

reduce the sense of taste while other drugs can dry the mouth, making it harder to taste things.

Always ask about side effects before taking new medication.

Smell: Bacteria in the

large intestine are to blame for making wind and stools smell, and certain foods can make waste smellier.

Products that are highly processed and rich in preservatives, as well as high-protein foods such as red meat, have lots of compounds that can produce the gas

Bloating can be caused by eating fatty foods

TAK

1 Inv
find
Cor
or t
3 Dor
— n
4 Est
toul
exis
5 Rea
Spu

Dr

E-mail m
tab.knott
to Dr Kne
LON1204
London

+ WHI
abo
strengt
leakage
and how

A Kegel r
muscles
the vagin
You have
the imple
rate is £2
electrical
pelvic flo

+ MY
She
ulcers.

Yes. Ulce
including
in this ca
principle
such as

+ I HA
a w
my 70s
years. I
the cho

If you've
size, sha
symptom
non-can
you get
such as
should b
or if the